

Building Bridges to Benefit Youth

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Service Coordination Strengthens Youth Reentry

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Introduction

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system have multiple needs and therefore require multiple supports and services from the community. Not all youth have access to the services they require to reenter the community effectively and not re-offend. Services have greater value and impact if they are provided in proper sequence and coordinated, which is difficult, given that they are funded and provided by diverse entities.¹

This policy brief focuses on the importance of service coordination among public and private agencies to provide an aftercare or reentry system that addresses the multiple needs of incarcerated youth. It explores federal and state policy initiatives to encourage coordination, addresses the issue of information sharing and juvenile confidentiality, and highlights local programs that are notable for their public and private partnerships.

The nearly 100,000 youth who leave correctional facilities every year² may "become lost in a tangle of bureaucratic agencies that too often share only limited information with each other, resulting in fragmented assistance."³

Federal Policy

There have been several attempts in Congress to coordinate services for youth. The Second Chance Act and the Federal Youth Coordination Act both provide good models for interagency cooperation, but have yet to become law.

Second Chance Act

The Second Chance Act of 2005 (H.R. 1704/S. 1934) links federal funding for reentry demonstration projects to coordination of services. States and local governments applying for funding must "provide extensive evidence of collaboration with...agencies overseeing health, housing, child welfare, education, substance abuse, and employment services, and local law enforcement."⁴ Applicants must also coordinate with public and private agencies to develop a strategic reentry plan and a reentry task force to reduce recidivism rates for returning prisoners.⁵

The Act has bipartisan support, with 101 cosponsors in the House and 16 cosponsors in the Senate. On February 15, 2006, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security forwarded the Act to the full House Judiciary Committee by a voice vote.⁶

For more information

The Re-Entry Policy Council has informational resources on the Second Chance Act. Visit www.reentrypolicy.org (click on Re-Entry in Action/Re-Entry Legislation). For the text of the bill, visit <http://thomas.loc.gov> (search for Second Chance Act or H.R. 1704).

Federal Youth Coordination Act

The Federal Youth Coordination Act (H.R. 856/S. 409) builds on recommendations from the 2003 White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth, which found that federal youth programs are administered across 12 departments and agencies with little communication or coordination among them. Currently, there are federal funding streams designed to meet varying needs of youth, but they are administered in silos, independent of one another. Youth's needs, however, are complex and interdependent. The Act establishes a Federal Youth Development Council that will enable the federal government to implement multifaceted approaches to reaching youth by leveraging and coordinating the existing resources of different federal agencies.⁷

The Act also supports state-level coordination efforts through technical assistance and grants, subject to the availability of appropriations. Priority will be given to states that have already initiated an interagency coordination effort focused on youth and demonstrate the inclusion of nonprofit organizations and young people in their coordination efforts. The legislation was passed by the House in November 2005 by a vote of 353 to 62 and has bipartisan support in the Senate.

For more information

The National Collaboration for Youth's Federal Youth Coordination Act Information Center contains information about the Act and links to the bill. Visit www.youthcoordinationact.org

State Policy

States have been called "laboratories for experimentation" in social policy⁸ and here are a few examples of state efforts to coordinate reentry services and improve communication between service providers.

Pennsylvania: Interagency Cooperation

Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell in 2003 called for the creation of a state-level Aftercare Working Group to coordinate a statewide juvenile aftercare reform campaign.⁹ The Working Group, composed of five Pennsylvania state agencies and commissions, in January 2005 released a Joint Policy Statement on Aftercare. The agencies pledged to work together and with other stakeholders to create a "model aftercare system" and set a goal of supporting every Pennsylvania county in developing its own comprehensive system by the year 2010.¹⁰ The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency created pilot programs in four counties to improve aftercare efforts and funded aftercare coordinator positions in the state juvenile probation officers association and the state Department of Public Welfare, which handles juvenile justice and child welfare.

The MacArthur Foundation selected Pennsylvania as the first state to participate in its Models for Change juvenile justice system reform initiative and declared that “there are strong partnerships among Pennsylvania’s stakeholders—judges, district attorneys, public defenders, community leaders, and city, county, and state officials—and considerable consensus about the strengths and weaknesses of the state’s juvenile justice system.”¹¹ Aftercare is one of the initiative’s three focus areas in the state and the Foundation is providing funding to build upon reforms already underway.¹²

For more information

The Juvenile Law Center has created a website for the Models for Change initiative in Pennsylvania. The Joint Policy Statement on Aftercare is also available on this site. Visit <http://216.158.40.79/mfc/index.cgi>.

Virginia: Coordinating School Reentry

The Virginia Board of Education has approved, but not yet finalized, new regulations governing the re-enrollment of students leaving juvenile detention and correctional centers. The purpose of these regulations is to promote early planning, cooperation and communication between agencies, local school systems, the Department of Juvenile Justice, local detention centers, students and their parents.

In the past, lack of coordination between agencies has led to delays in re-enrollment¹³, which in turn contributes to increased recidivism.¹⁴ JustChildren, a program of the Legal Aid Justice Center, participated in the development of the re-enrollment regulations, and recommended that the regulations outline the responsibilities and timelines for each of the agencies involved in the re-enrollment process.¹⁵

The regulations require that schools permit students who exit juvenile justice facilities to enroll in school within two days of their release back into their communities and contain provisions for counseling upon release. The regulations also state that a re-enrollment coordinator shall be appointed in each school system to facilitate this process.

For more information

The regulations are available at <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/studentsrvcs/proposedre-enrollmentregs.pdf>. JustChildren’s *A Summary of Best Practices in School Reentry for Incarcerated Youth Returning Home* is available on the National Juvenile Justice Network’s website at www.njjn.org/members_public_state_VA.html.

Interagency Information Sharing and Juvenile Confidentiality

Program planners and advocates concerned with smoothing the reentry of youth back into the community through coordinated services will inevitably grapple with the issue of information sharing across agencies. Lack of sufficient information sharing can lead to inappropriate treatment, inaccurate assessments, and unmet needs.¹⁶ At the same time, it is critical to keep in mind that incautious and overly free information sharing can result in serious “educational and socioeconomic consequences, including expulsion from school, loss of public housing, and exacerbation of delinquency.”¹⁷ Consequently, before any juvenile records can be shared, planners must first carefully analyze the complex web of federal and state regulations governing health, education and juvenile justice records confidentiality. Program planners and advocates will be greatly assisted by the wealth of web-based resources on juvenile confidentiality.

For more information

For an overview of the issues involved in information sharing:

<http://www.hogg.utexas.edu/Pages/InfoShare.html>

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/178281.pdf>

For state-by-state laws on juvenile record confidentiality:

<http://dept.fvtc.edu/ojdp/states.htm>

For information on HIPAA regulations:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/>

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacysummary.pdf>

http://www.jlc.org/Resources/pdfs/consent_confidentiality_2nd.pdf

For information on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004330.pdf>

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/163705.pdf>

For information about federal housing laws regarding admission and eviction standards for people with criminal records:

<http://www.hirenetwork.org/pdfs/Safe@Home.pdf>

For information about connecting youthful offenders with employment opportunities:

http://www.hirenetwork.org/pdfs/WorkingAhead/1Contents_Intro.pdf

<http://www.lac.org/lac/index.php>

Programs Coordinating Reentry Services

Many local nonprofit organizations, such as those profiled here, have developed reentry programs that are notable for their partnerships with public and private agencies. The federal and state policy initiatives previously discussed can facilitate the development of more collaboration on a greater scale.

Volunteers of America Delaware Valley Ready4Work Program

Volunteers of America case managers in Camden, NJ, coordinate services for juvenile offenders returning home. They work closely with juvenile justice officials, schools, and community and faith-based organizations to connect these youth to job training, education, and mentoring.¹⁸ The program is part of Ready4Work, a 17-site, national reentry initiative of Public/Private Ventures. Case management is “the glue that holds together the program’s various components”.¹⁹ Program sites have found that the case manager’s roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and that they must be given manageable caseloads.

For more information

To learn more about the Volunteers of America program, visit www.voadv.org (click on Programs & Services). To see a report about Public/Private Venture’s Ready4Work initiative, visit

www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/189_publication.pdf.

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to open a Club and create a reentry program at the Ethan Allen School for Boys, a juvenile detention institution. The youth have access to Club programs and, ninety days prior to release, work with Club staff on a reentry plan. The Club coordinates with community partners

to provide the youth with housing assistance, mental health and addiction counseling, job training and placement, and education. Staff members follow up with the youth for at least one year after their release.²⁰

The Milwaukee program is part of Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Targeted Re-Entry initiative, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. The initiative is based on the Intensive Aftercare Program created by Dr. David Altschuler and Dr. Troy Armstrong, which depends on collaboration among institutional staff, community aftercare staff, community service providers, and the youth's family.²¹ An evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs initiative in four sites, including Milwaukee, is currently underway.²²

For more information

The Boys & Girls Club program at the Ethan Allen School was featured in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*; visit www2.jsonline.com/news/metro/may04/226707.asp. To learn more about the Intensive Aftercare Program, visit www.csus.edu/ssis/cdcps/iap.htm.

Conclusion

The Council of State Governments' Re-Entry Policy Council found that "the single most important common denominator" in successful reentry initiatives is collaboration between at least two independent organizations. Among the Council's recommendations for coordination are recognizing the complexities of the different systems involved in reentry, such as criminal justice, mental health, and workforce development, and expanding opportunities for intersystem and interdisciplinary education and training.²³ The policies and programs profiled in this brief demonstrate that it is possible to build bridges between systems to provide youth with the services and supports they need to reenter the community successfully.

Endnotes

1. David Altschuler, Ph.D. and Troy Armstrong, Ph.D., *Intensive Juvenile Aftercare Reference Guide* (Sacramento, CA: Juvenile Reintegration and Aftercare Center, 2004), 1-9, 3-2, 4-2, 5-3.
2. Howard Snyder, "An Empirical Portrait of the Youth Reentry Population," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, Vol. 2. No. 1 (1998): 39-55.
3. JustChildren, *A Summary of Best Practices in School Reentry for Incarcerated Youth Returning Home* (Charlottesville, VA: Legal Aid Justice Center, 2004): 5.
4. H.R. 1704, Sec. 3(f)(3).
5. *Ibid.*, Sec. 3(h), (i).
6. THOMAS, H.R. 1704, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:HR01704:@@X>, accessed March 1, 2006.
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10. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *Joint Policy Statement on Aftercare* (2005), <http://216.158.40.79/mfc/jointpositions.pdf>, accessed March 2, 2006.
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12. *Ibid.*
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19. Joshua Good and Pamela Sherrid, *When the Gates Open: Ready4Work—A National Response to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, 2005): 20.
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22. Indiana University School of Social Work, Evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Targeted Re-Entry Approach, <http://socialwork.iu.edu/snaw/584/page.htm>, accessed March 31, 2006.
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Building Bridges to Benefit Youth

The National Collaboration for Youth and National Juvenile Justice Network are partnering to strengthen connections between youth service providers and juvenile justice advocates. Vulnerable youth and families consistently transition between various publicly funded systems, from child welfare, community mental health, family support, special education and juvenile justice systems. Challenges abound, and youth frequently fail to receive the level of care and support they need. Moreover, a healthy youth development philosophy and approach should be applied to programming for all youth, regardless of the system in which they may find themselves. This initiative believes that the existing silos between programs, funding, and, in particular, advocacy, are counterproductive to the welfare of children and aims to break down those barriers. For more information, visit www.collab4youth.org/ncy/cji.htm.

The National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), an affinity group of the National Human Services Assembly, includes 50 national, non-profit, youth development organizations. NCY’s mission is to provide a united voice as advocates for youth to improve the conditions of young people in America, and to help young people reach their full potential. For more information, visit www.collab4youth.org.

The National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN), which is hosted by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, comprises 26 state organizations and coalitions that work for fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate adjudication and treatment for all children, youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.